
CIRM approves \$1.7 million for high school research opportunities fostering creativity

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Sacramento, Calif. – Today the governing board of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, the state stem cell agency created by proposition 71, approved nine high school internship opportunities worth \$1.7 million over three years. These programs extend last year's pilot program of the Creativity Awards, which encourage California's young people to pursue careers developing the next generation of stem cell-based therapies.

The programs each support high school students carrying out stem cell research in California labs for the summer. As a way of fostering creativity, the students are also encouraged to carry out a research project in a second discipline of their choice. These Creativity Awards represent just one part of CIRM's overall effort to reach high school, undergraduate, masters and graduate level students representing the diversity of California's population.

"This program exposes high school students to cutting edge medical research and encourages the kind of creative thinking that leads to groundbreaking discoveries," said Alan Trounson, CIRM President. "The pilot program last summer demonstrated the demand for stem cell research opportunities among California's young people. Expanding the program and extending it for three years will inspire more students from all socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue careers in stem cell science and nurtures the creative thinking that will help them be successful."

Today the governing board heard an update on progress made by the fourteen disease teams approved in October 2009 and learned about one project that is not continuing. These research projects—worth a total of almost \$225 million—are all working toward developing a stem cell-based therapy for a disease with unmet medical needs. They have the ambitious goal of filing an application with the Food and Drug Administration to begin clinical trials in humans within four years. Before issuing the awards CIRM and the teams of researchers worked together to develop research milestones and success criteria that would inform decisions about the future direction of the projects.

Thirteen of the projects are currently making progress toward achieving their milestones. One of the projects had some revisions to focus the research, and one award to the University of California, San Francisco, is not continuing. The team was attempting to find the best stem cell approach for delivering chemotherapy directly to a type of brain tumor called recurrent glioblastoma. This type of tumor has few effective therapies and a poor prognosis. The team's research did not produce data to suggest that they had met the agreed upon milestone criteria for selecting the best candidate cell type to take forward in the subsequent stages of the project. Their project did, however, develop methods that may be useful for other projects involved in developing a therapy for treating recurrent brain tumors.

"CIRM's Disease Team Awards play a critical role in creating new stem cell therapies for patients by supporting innovative projects that might not have received funding from other sources," said Jonathan Thomas, CIRM governing board chair. "The agency is protecting taxpayer investment by creating clear milestones that these projects must achieve before receiving addition funding. This creative approach to funding high-risk projects drives new therapies while also safeguarding the state's investment."

The two years of research resulted in published papers that will guide other scientists who are developing ways of delivering cancer therapies using stem cells. The agency anticipates saving roughly \$13 million by not continuing funding.

Today's meeting also included a discussion of proposed goals for a revision of the strategic plan and an update on progress toward achieving the five- and ten-year goals laid out in 2006. The ten-year goals are being revised into the new five-year goals to reflect progress already made and changes in the stem cell research field. As a step toward achieving the new five-year goals, the governing board discussed two proposed funding prioritization scenarios for the agency's remaining \$836 million that has not already been allocated to other funding commitments. Both scenarios included continued funding for fundamental research, proportionately higher increases in research for developing new disease therapies, and limiting future investments in training.

The governing board also voted to require CIRM grantees to make electronic copies of published papers available within 12 months of publication. This policy is in line with a similar policy held by the National Institutes of Health. Those electronic copies will be available through the CIRM website.

At the meeting Thomas and Trounson welcomed new members of CIRM staff, including Kevin McCormack who will be the Senior Director of Public Communications and Patient Advocate Outreach. McCormack spent the past 5.5 years with the California Pacific Medical Center as a Media Relations Manager, and prior to that spent more than 20 years as a TV journalist, including seven years at KRON as a Writer/Producer of health and medical news.

Funded CIRM Creativity Awards

| Grant Number | Institution | Title | Committed funding |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|-------------------|
| TC1-06227 | Beckman Research Institute of City of Hope | Creativity Award Program in Stem Cell Biology for California High School Students | \$211,200 |
| TC1-06302 | University of Southern California | CIRM STAR High School Summer Research and Creativity Program | \$264,000 |
| TC1-05868 | Stanford University | SIRM Program: Stem Cell & Developmental Biology Research Internships | \$288,750 |
| TC1-05956 | The Scripps Research Institute | Stem Cell Summer Academy: Creating the Next Generation of Scientists | \$206,250 |
| TC1-05946 | Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland | CHORI/UC Berkeley Summer Stem Cell Research Internship Program for High School Students | \$115,500 |
| TC1-06252 | The J. David Gladstone Institutes | Gladstone Summer Scholars (GSS) Research Program | \$30,690 |
| TC1-05787 | University of California, Santa Barbara | Research Mentorship Program-Immersing High School Students in College Research | \$223,080 |
| TC1-05961 | University of California, San Francisco | UCSF SEP High School Intern Program | \$143,550 |
| TC1-06070 | University of California, Davis | Internship at a Cutting Edge CIRM-funded Stem Cell Research Facility | \$ 264,000 |
| Total funds committed by the ICOC | | | \$1,747,020 |

A list of all awards funded by CIRM is available on our website, along with a list of how much funding has gone to each institution.

About CIRM: CIRM was established in November 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was overwhelmingly approved by voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities. A list of grants and loans awarded to date may be seen here: <http://www.cirm.ca.gov/for-researchers/researchfunding>.

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